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Little dragon of the desert

by
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Ask a Washington resident to describe the state and he probably won't mention deserts and sand dunes. Yet one reason Washington has over 640 species of wildlife is that the state has a great variety of habitats, including the desert. And the desert is where you'll find the short-horned lizard.

Horned lizards (called horned toads by many people) live in a variety of habitats from hard pan to soft sand and in areas characterized by short grass and sagebrush.

Washington's short-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma douglasii*) is found in eastern Washington, except in the three southeastern and three northeastern counties. This short, stubby lizard may be light or dark tan in color with dark blotches. It is fond of ants but will eat wasps, bees, beetles, grasshoppers, spiders, snails and butterflies. The females give birth in July; as many as two dozen young, about 12 mm (one-half inch) long, are born alive.

Our Washington lizard can be distinguished from other horned lizard

species by its short head spines and small chin shields (scales). Adults are from $2\frac{1}{4}$ to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches (5.5 to 9.5 mm) long from snout to vent; the tail makes up about half the body length.

When it is cornered, the short-horned lizard may hiss and inflate its body. Blood may spurt from the corner of a captured lizard's eye. This is caused by the rupture of a vein at the base of the eyelid.

The following game department wildlife recreation areas are good places to study these interesting creatures: Oak Creek, L. T. Murray, Colockum, Quilomene, Potholes, Desert, Gloyd Seeps, Crab Creek and Wahluke. Feel free to take pictures of short-horned lizards, but leave them in their native habitats. They are difficult to keep and usually don't live long in captivity.



Reference: *Amphibians and Reptiles of Western North America*, by Robert C. Stebbins, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1954.

